

**INDIANAPOLIS JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL**  
**CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**  
**BACKGROUND INFORMATION • Q & A**  
**JULY 17, 2006**

**What is the background to this current crisis?**

In May 2000, Israel pulled all its troops out of southern Lebanon, ending an 18 year military presence intended to provide a security buffer to protect northern Israel from attack by Hezbollah. The Israeli withdrawal was conducted in coordination with the UN and, according to the UN, constituted Israel's fulfillment of its obligations under Security Council Resolution 425 (1978).

Israel expected that the Lebanese government would deploy its army along the southern border, disarm Hezbollah and maintain order. This has not happened. Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shi'ite terrorist organization, has not only retained and enhanced its arms, but it is effectively in control of all of southern Lebanon. Despite repeated complaints from the United States, the UN Security Council and Israel, the Lebanese government has failed to disarm Hezbollah. Indeed, Hezbollah has an estimated 12,000 Katyusha rockets in its arsenal.

The Hezbollah attack came on the heels of the Gaza crisis, touched off on June 25<sup>th</sup> when several Palestinian organizations led by Hamas - which is the ruling party in the Palestinian parliament - carried out a well-planned, bloody attack on an Israeli military emplacement at Kerem Shalom, adjacent to the southern Gaza Strip. Since Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip last summer, Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups have fired hundreds of Qassam rockets into Israeli communities in pre-1967 sovereign Israel. Since June 1<sup>st</sup> alone, Palestinian terrorists have fired over 130 Qassam rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israeli towns and villages near Gaza, hitting Sederot repeatedly, wounding tens of Israeli civilians and causing thousands of dollars in property damage.

**What precipitated this crisis with Hezbollah?**

On Sunday July 11, in an unprovoked act of aggression across Israel's internationally recognized border with Lebanon, Hezbollah terrorists launched a salvo of Katyusha rockets and mortar bombs into Israeli towns, farms and villages. Tens of thousands of residents of northern Israel have been forced into bomb shelters all across the north.

At the same time, Hezbollah terrorists crossed the border, and attacked an Israeli patrol killing three soldiers and kidnapping two more. Hezbollah killed another five Israeli soldiers in search operations in southern Lebanon.

**What is Israel's goal?**

Israel's intention is to free its abducted soldiers and to remove the terrorist threat from its northern border.

**Why is the Israeli response so forceful?**

Hezbollah is a member of the Lebanese government. The attack was carried out against Israeli civilians and soldiers on sovereign Israeli territory. The international community has failed to do anything to convince or assist the Lebanese in removing the Hezbollah threat to Israel (if, indeed, the Lebanese even want to do so). More restrained responses to prior aggression (such as a prior swap of prisoners for kidnapped soldiers) have only emboldened Hezbollah, and its Iranian and Syrian sponsors, to again test Israel's will and capacity for self defense. Israel was left with no alternative but to defend itself and its citizens, and is now reacting to an act of war by a neighboring sovereign state.

**Has Syria played a role in this crisis?**

Yes. Syria hosts the headquarters of a number of Palestinian radical Islamist terror groups, including Hamas, in its capital Damascus. As such, Syria shelters and provides logistical support for Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal. Operating from Damascus, Mashaal commands terrorists within the Palestinian territories who carry out attacks against Israelis, mostly civilians. These attacks have included the ongoing bombardment of southern Israel with Qassam rockets, the recent infiltration and abduction of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, the kidnapping and murder of Israeli civilian Eliyahu Asheri, and the attempted kidnapping of two Israeli teenage girls.

Syria also gives logistical support to Hezbollah, including the transfer of arms, munitions and operatives through the Damascus airport and border crossings into Lebanon. Hezbollah would not be able to operate in Lebanon without clear Syrian sponsorship.

### **Has Iran played a role in this crisis? What recent events point to Iran's involvement?**

Yes. Hezbollah's main benefactor is Iran, which provides funding, weapons, directives and even Iranian Revolutionary Guards. In fact, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards created Hezbollah in the 1980s. For all practical purposes, Hezbollah is an arm of the Teheran regime.

Iran has also made considerable inroads into Palestinian terrorist organizations, including Fatah's al Aqsa Brigade and Hamas' Iz a Din al Kassam group. It provides their terror cells with funding, technical instruction and operational directives.

- In recent weeks, senior Iranian officials began advocating an escalation of violent activity against both Israel and Zionists around the world.
- Just last month, Syria and Iran signed a military cooperation agreement. The Syrian defense minister stated that the two countries "are establishing a joint front against Israel... [since] Iran regards Syria's security as its own."
- In recent weeks, Iran has been constantly delaying its response to the ultimatum presented to it by UN Security Council regarding its nuclear program. Iran was required to respond to the ultimatum before the G-8 summit in St. Petersburg on July 12. The international community has denied Iran's request to postpone the deadline until August.
- On July 11, the same day Hezbollah launched its attacks on Israel, Iranian National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani, who is in charge of Iran's nuclear dossier, made a surprise visit to Damascus. Syrian Vice President Farouq Al Shar stated after the meeting that Hezbollah and Hamas would make their own decisions regarding their affairs.
- All this points to the likelihood that the attacks on Israel's borders - set off by elements supported by Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria - are meant to take the pressure off Iran by triggering a major military clash in the Middle East, which will divert international attention from Iran's nuclear program.

### **So why did Hezbollah attack now?**

Timing is everything. Iran is currently under intense international pressure to halt its nuclear weapons program. The Teheran regime, whose leader denies the reality of the Holocaust and has called for Israel to be "wiped off the map," is attempting to distract the world's attention from its nuclear ambitions.

### **What is the ideology behind Hamas and Hezbollah, and why does Syria and Iran support them?**

Both Hamas and Hezbollah are motivated by radical Islamist ideology. They support the destruction of the State of Israel - as part of a global struggle to wage Jihad against the Western world with the goal of making radical Islam the prevailing world power. The Syrians and Iranians support these groups for different reasons. Syria is a secular dictatorship, while Iran is a radical Shi'ite Islamist theocracy. Yet, these two regimes find common cause in their support for Hamas and Hezbollah because both provide Syria and Iran with leverage to spread the influence of their own regimes.

Diversion from other issues that have exposed them lately to international pressure is another reason for Syrian and Iranian support.

- Syria is facing rising criticism over its involvement in the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and its interference in Lebanese affairs.
- Iran is exposed to widening pressure over its nuclear development program.

### **Why should the international community support Israel's position in this crisis?**

There is a growing understanding and consensus in the international community that radical Islamist terror is a global menace that needs to be confronted with determination and tenacity. Failure to oppose this movement would be disastrous for international peace and stability.

### **Why does Israel bomb buildings and infrastructure? Doesn't this endanger civilians?**

The Israelis are targeting only facilities that directly serve the terrorist organizations in their attacks against Israel. For example, Israel targeted the runways of the Beirut International Airport because they serve Hezbollah's efforts to re-supply itself with weapons. Israel also targeted buildings, such as the Hezbollah television studios, which are a vital means of communication for Hezbollah terrorists. Additionally, roadways and ports are targeted in an effort to prevent Hezbollah from moving the abducted IDF soldiers out of Lebanon. As always, the terrorists purposely hide themselves and their stockpiles of weapons in residential areas, endangering the surrounding populations. Israel takes extreme care to reduce to a minimum the risk to the civilian population, leafleting southern Lebanon with a warning for residents to leave the area. Responsibility belongs to Hezbollah if civilians are harmed.